

ENCOUNTER Sydney Opera House 2022 Script

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Commissioned by FORM Dance Projects

1. Opening

You are here. Sky. Water. Sails. White. White. Gadigal land. The place that was for tens and tens and thousands of years known as Tubowgule. Almost winter time. Almost night time. And a breeze on the water and the city in our sight and a hint of green space that says something about the way things might have been here. Before. In this place, metal speaks to concrete, speaks to glass and glass and tile and someone walking by looks up and points towards the distance beyond to where people's lives are being written into the squares of endless apartments and says look...look the past and the present and the future are here and you're a part of that. We are all a part of that.

That roof, those triangles that jut out into the sky, those arches and domes are having a conversation with this city about aspiration: They say, dream big. Be big. And then you look at that building and you are reminded that we are small after all. Small things in a big story that goes backwards and forwards into deep time.

People walking by holding hands. A girl's first day in a new city. The feet of someone who came here yesterday, today, the day before jogging along the same path. A traveller walks by, looks this way, and shouts wow to no one. There is so much here, so much happening all the time. It's hard to make sense of how we all connect to this space we share. But all this sky and water and concrete—it's a net to catch everyone in, to hold us all together.

And now. Here we are. Here we are where the future keeps coming and coming and now, now it's time to dance.

2. Peacock Spider/ Sarah's Story

My body is a story and I can stretch it over to yours. You know, back in time and through this time. Like I can tell you in a sharp kick and the force of my arm what it's like to be a first generation African Australian. And I can say that I know this space isn't mine because I'm not part of that first nation but you know I am here and I'm am a part of it. This place where I was born. It's in the way that my arm talks to my elbow, talks to the flick in my wrist. My body's got so much to say to you. Listen. I'm holding the space. I'm taking it for a moment. Listen. This is the place where we meet, on the surface of my skin. I want to talk about how we share. It's there somewhere in the detail of the way my hands rise up above my head. That's when I'm taking the place and the music and I'm passing it over to you, like that's when we become community when I don't have to explain my kind of movement. When I'll press my story into a beat between my knuckles and the sudden slide of a hip and we can move together, to the things that are beyond here but always in the jolt of my bones and my heel pressed into this earth.

3. Versions of Ourselves/Beauty and the Beast/ Naomi's story

You're never quite good enough at anything. Not anything. But you try. You put your left foot down and then your right. Stand up. Stand a little higher. Be proud. These are the things you do to survive. Collapse. Turn inward. Have a little quiet time. Your outside self is so different from your inside self. It's exhausting, keeping up with all the different versions of you. Stand up. Sit down. Collapse. Try to be you but a different version of you who's more successful this time. Stand up. Sit down. Breathe. Just be you. Or maybe a version of you. Just be. Breathe.

4. Dance Dance/Anaphora loop

This time. The place is loud and then it isn't. We're out of time and that house created for the people, for the music, for the bodies made of milk and oil dancing— it stops. Time stops. Time collapses— holds a different kind of weight. We've been let lose in time and now everyone comes out of the apartment buildings, walks the harbour slow, tries to catch time again, to feel its weight again, but now, now time is elastic. Everyone is missing someone – on another side of this harbour or an ocean or some other body of water that it is no longer safe to cross. Past time creeps in. Deep time. Time when there were plenty oysters and mussels and fish and wallabies and kangaroos in this place. Time when there was celebration and dance and music and no opera house. Time when food and supplies and conversation were traded in these waterways and all the best fishing places got turned into islands to lock convicts up. Time of plague. Time of brickmaking and fabric dying and boat building. Time that Bennelong got kidnapped here. Time when the Queen stood on the steps and waved. Time of plague before the last plague when it leaked out of the abattoirs here and floated down the water in the hooves of pigs and the skin of cows. And the time before the time before that when white people bought other plagues here. All those times. Times in the layers of this place. Times that won't go away even when they built this building made of space and light. Times before New Year's Eve and Fire Works and coloured lights breaking over the water and Utzon showing how he could make a building look like the slices of an orange piled together. Lovers holding hands, walking dogs. Time that pops up unexpectedly into the present. More times. The times when we'll start the story over again. The next time. And then the next time.

5. Lawrencea's Story/Ridge dance

My father's country is the ocean. He sits on the balcony and looks out towards it and back fifty years in time to when he planted coconuts and spinach and mango trees and fished with his brothers and the women shook stories out of their bodies when they danced and I wasn't born and he hadn't died. But I sit there on that veranda and I know he's there too, watching the sun melt into the water and break across the flame trees. He's there watching the world extend down the mountain and over those fifteen islands and out towards the sea.

6. Closing

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